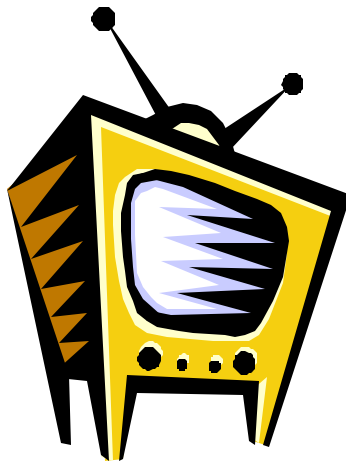


T V M T

TELEVISION MONTANA



Uniting
People &
Government
Through the
Power of
Television

Legislative Services Division - PO Box 201706, Helena, MT 59620-1706 - 406.444.3064

EVOLUTION

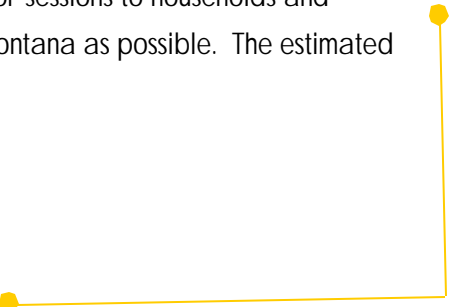
Television Montana (TVMT) is a state public affairs television and Internet broadcasting service established through passage of House Bill No. 144 by the 57th Legislature in 2001.

The purpose of TVMT is to provide Montana citizens with increased and unfiltered access to unbiased information about state government deliberations through gavel-to-gavel coverage of the legislative process and through nonpartisan, objective treatment of executive and judicial branch activities and events.

The service is housed in the state capitol in Helena. TVMT is governed by the Legislative Council and managed by legislative staff, who will issue a contract to a qualified nonprofit organization for production services during the 2003 session.

TVMT is an outgrowth of an experiment in closed-circuit TV coverage of House and Senate floor sessions in 2001. In addition, the audio signals from both chambers were "streamed" (transmitted) to a limited number of desktop computers inside and near the state capitol building.

The next phase of TVMT will, with sufficient financial support, provide more expanded coverage to a much broader television audience and to Internet users across the state. In 2002, the goal is to acquire the production equipment, computer technology, technical services, bandwidth, and transmission and distribution capabilities necessary to provide live, tape-delayed, and archived coverage of selected House and Senate hearings as well as floor sessions to households and classrooms in as many urban and rural areas of Montana as possible. The estimated cost is approximately \$1 million.



CITIZEN LEGISLATURE

The citizens of Montana have an inherent right to watch and listen to their government at work. Education about the Legislature and its processes is vital to public understanding of the laws, rules, and policies that affect the lives and livelihoods of all Montanans. The gavel-to-gavel approach, similar to that employed by C-Span in the national arena, provides a window on governmental proceedings without the selective sound bites, political spin, and other distortions that currently prevail in network news. This method of communication offers a means of transcending distance from Helena, overcoming detachment from the political process, and counteracting disaffection for the Legislature. Televising state government proceedings will boost the legitimacy of elected officials and agency personnel by making them more accountable and their work more transparent.

Montana has not escaped a nationwide trend toward diminishing coverage of state government by the commercial media. TVMT will both complement and supplement the generally brief and highly edited stories that appear on the major networks. Term limits, the devolving of certain powers from Congress and federal agencies to the states, and the ongoing challenges of economic development underscore the importance of state government, and television will stimulate citizen participation in the process.

TVMT will bring additional benefits as well. Video technology provides an accurate and accessible record of legislative and other governmental activities. To date, there has never been a way to capture the often dramatic debates on the House and Senate floor. Citizens living in remote areas have had to travel hundreds of miles in the dead of winter to testify at committee hearings and witness the progress or demise of legislation. TVMT will enable them to keep track of significant bills and, in the future, deliver testimony through interactive television. Moreover, TVMT aims to cover interim committees, various executive branch events, and oral arguments before the Montana Supreme Court.

PARTNERSHIP

TVMT is an infant poised for rapid growth. At present, the system is comprised of remote-controlled cameras in the House and Senate chambers, associated electronic components in a "head end" master control facility, some rudimentary studio and computer equipment, a dozen television monitors at strategic locations in the capitol, and many long strands of coaxial cable connecting hearing rooms to the head end.

The next steps are to place unobtrusive cameras in several hearing rooms, improve the quality of the video and audio signals, and deliver the service to Montana PBS, public access channels, other cable television stations, and educational institutions via telecommunication networks and satellite systems. This is a tall order, requiring creativity, cooperation, and cost sharing among public and private sector entities.

House Bill No. 144 contained a small amount of funding (\$60,000) derived from increased registration fees for lobbyists. The bill authorizes the expenditure of \$1.3 million if that amount can be obtained from outside sources, such as cash and in-kind contributions from small and large businesses in the private sector, federal and foundation grants, and individual donors. Combining the seed money collected from lobbyists with gifts and donations will provide a solid foundation for more comprehensive coverage and expanded distribution and for obtaining public funding to sustain the service.

Systems Integration

The threat of additional terrorist attacks against the United States and unrestricted access to the state capitol and its environs are seemingly contradictory. However, project staff and security personnel are investigating the feasibility of a joint venture for better television coverage and enhanced capitol complex security. Combining resources will provide a cost-effective solution to the challenge of meeting the legislative mandate for an "open window" on state government and the compelling need for a safe, secure, and visitor-friendly working environment in the state capitol. Expanded surveillance capabilities in key locations will ensure the transparency of government proceedings and public activity alike.

VISION

The future of TVMT is bright. Gavel-to-gavel coverage will let the sun shine in on the legislative process. Full-time, year-round coverage of all three branches of government will cast light on the whole gamut of public policy deliberations and decisions. On the horizon are many shining prospects for diverse public affairs programming, including televised tours of historic places and properties, informative documentaries about key industries and outstanding personalities, imported programs from Canada and abroad, and coverage of sporting events in the state's far-flung communities.

The long-term goal is to make TVMT service available to all citizens via the Internet, cable television systems, and Montana PBS. Down the road, new technologies will enable direct citizen interaction with state government and more distance learning programs through Interactive Television.

TVMT will become a model of unbiased, nonpartisan television services for export to other parts of the world, especially rural areas where people have great aspirations for democratic freedoms, uncorrupted institutions, economic development, and access to accurate and useful information about their government and about their friends in the United States.

TVMT is Big Sky enterprise at its best, blending government resources and private support for a vital public service.



UNDERWRITING

In light of recent trends and events, including the attacks on September 11 and a nationwide recession, as well as tightening agency budgets and financial distress in the corporate sector here in Montana, 2002 is a difficult year to be raising funds. The TVMT project needs \$1.3 million dollars but can reach critical, short-term goals with less.

Contributions to this endeavor are tax deductible. Every dollar counts. Gifts and donations of any size are welcomed and will be acknowledged by on-screen credits and other means. Send a check to the Legislative Services Division—TVMT, and you will promptly receive a small receipt and a huge thank you.

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